

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

Contract Proposal Writing and Tips



Presented by:

Department of Public Social Services
Contract Management Division

DISCLAIMER:

THESE ARE GENERAL GUIDELINES/TIPS TO MAKE PROPOSAL WRITING “EASIER,” BUT PROPOSERS NEED TO DECIDE WHAT WORKS BEST FOR THEM. IF THERE IS A DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THESE GENERAL GUIDELINES AND THE RFP, RELY ON WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THE RFP. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO KNOW THE RFP AND FOLLOW IT COMPLETELY, EXACTLY AND THOROUGHLY.

I. Review Request for Proposals (RFP)

- Read the RFP thoroughly from cover to cover. Then read it again, this time concentrating on the separate parts of the RFP.
- Prepare a checklist and a timeline for preparing and submitting your organization's proposal.
- Ensure you review, understand and respond to the RFP's minimum mandatory requirements.

II. Who Does What?

- Who in your organization needs to be a part of the proposal writing effort? Will different people be responsible for writing different parts of the proposal, such as Executive, Program, Fiscal, Human Resources?
- Each organization is different.
- If possible, one person should be the coordinator and manage the timeline.

III. Writing the Proposal

- Use a consistent style of writing, avoid undefined acronyms, and repetitive use of words.
- Use good grammar and correct typos. The proposal should be neat and organized. If you cannot submit a carefully written proposal, it will leave doubt in the mind of the review panel as to how well you will do the tasks.
- Be clear and concise regarding how your organization will provide the required services.
- Write your proposal based on the criteria provided in the Request for Proposals.
- Writing the proposal takes time. Prepare a draft. Make sure you allow time for revisions.
- Have someone read your draft proposal who does not know the particulars of the project on which you are proposing and have that person ask you questions. This can point out ambiguous statements, inconsistencies, and help the organization fix the proposal before it is submitted.
- Remember, writing the text is only half the work. The rest is assembling budgets, completing required forms, copying, collating, packaging and delivering the proposal by the deadline of the RFP.

IV. County Proposal Formats Are Similar, But Differences Exist Because Services Vary

- Read the instructions! Re-read the instructions.
- Follow the format specified in the RFP, including any requirements on the length of the proposal or components of the proposal.
- Your proposal's score will be lower if you leave out required elements.
- Address the County's needs directly. Proposers must ensure the proposal provides the information that is being requested, in the order requested.

V. Transmittal Letter/Table of Contents/Executive Summary

- The Transmittal Letter must be one (1) page long on the organization's letterhead and include the required elements. Make sure the person authorized to sign on behalf of the organization signs the letter.
- The Table of Contents should list the various components on the left side with the page numbers on the right side. This is one of the last parts of the proposal that is finalized. Make sure in proofreading that someone checks to see that the subject on the left side of the page matches the page number listed on the right side of the page.
- The Executive Summary should condense and highlight the contents of the Proposer's Business Proposal. Information here must also be included in the body of the proposal (with more detail).
- The Executive Summary should be brief, concise—and catch the attention of the proposal reader.

VI. Proposer's Qualifications

- The proposer must provide sufficient, relevant background information to demonstrate that it has the capacity to perform required services, sufficient expertise and experience.
- Provide a response to each of the elements requested in the RFP; e.g., state the number of years of experience the organization has in providing the services required by the RFP. If the organization's past services have been "substantially similar," the proposal must state what the services were and how and why they can be considered "substantially similar."
- Provide references that can attest to your organization's performance providing the same or "substantially similar" services required by the RFP. Ensure contact information, including phone numbers, are accurate and up-to-date.
- List all County contracts within the last three years.
- Call your references and let them know you are using them as a reference. Make sure they will be available to the County when the County calls to validate your statements.

VI. Proposer's Qualifications (continued)

- Provide the required financial records. The County needs to know your organization has sufficient assets to ensure it will be able to provide the services needed for the entire length of the contract.
- Again, provide information on each element requested in the RFP. If an answer is none, answer that way. For example, if your organization has never failed or refused to complete a contract, say, Organization A has never failed or refused to complete a contract.

VII. Proposer's Methodology

- This is where you demonstrate to the evaluation panel how your organization plans to accomplish the goals and objectives of the program.
- Do not omit anything of importance.
- Most, if not all, the reviewers probably have some knowledge of the program being contracted. But, do not assume they know something and thus not state it in your proposal. You need to make it clear to the reviewers that you know the material. They will not know that you know the material unless you demonstrate it.
- Do not simply repeat the Statement of Work from the RFP. You must provide information on how your organization will accomplish the tasks. Describe in detail your approach to providing the services requested in the Statement of Work and include as much information as possible without overstating your capabilities.
- If the evaluators do not understand something, it is because the proposer did not explain it adequately. Try to eliminate company jargon or abbreviations.
- Once again, make sure you address each item listed in the RFP.

VIII. Proposer's Quality Control Plan

- The RFP details the elements of the quality control plan your organization needs to develop.
- Consider carefully what you need to include in the plan to ensure your organization meets the outcome measures required by the contract.
- Ensure your plan includes how you will evaluate your subcontractors' performance (if any).
- Include how frequently you will self-evaluate your performance and the performance of your subcontractors.
- This self-evaluation plan should include both a quantitative assessment and a qualitative analysis.
- Ensure you state the criteria your organization will use for measuring the services provided by your organization.
- A good plan should allow you to find and correct weaknesses before someone else identifies them, such as when the County's contract monitors pay you a visit.
- If you have sample quality control forms that you believe can be used or adapted to the RFP's services, include and explain them in your proposal.

IX. Proposer's Staffing Plan

- Identify the required personnel by function and, if possible, by name.
- For administrative and management staff, stress their experience and capability. For those individuals already in your organization, provide a resume. For positions for which you will be seeking new hires, provide a job description that includes the minimum requirements for the position.
- Ensure you include experience administrative/management staff has in the service being sought by the RFP.
- For lower level staff, include job descriptions with minimum requirements.
- For bilingual staff, include how you will certify they can competently provide services (reading, writing and speaking) in the second language.
- Ensure staffing matches the services to be provided.
- Include the number of staff you will use for the project.
- What will you do to recruit staff now and in the future?
- How will you cover vacations? Sick leaves? Etc.
- What type of training will you provide to staff? How often?
- Ensure your staffing plan is consistent with your budget. If you are proposing to use more or less staff than is reflected in your budget, evaluators will question it.

X. Acceptance/Exception to Terms and Conditions in Sample Contract

- Clearly state the organization's acceptance or exception to the terms and conditions in the sample contract.
- If your organization has an exception to a term, state the exception, state the reason for the exception, provide alternative language, and impact, if any, on your bid.
- Please note, many terms and conditions are required by statute and cannot be negotiated.

XI. Subcontractors or Partners

- Clearly indicate any subcontractors or partners in the transmittal letter, Executive Summary and throughout the proposal. Their role must be fully explained and documented.
- The primary contractor is fully responsible for the actions of its partners and subcontractors.
- Include a statement from any partners or subcontractors signed by the authorized person for that organization that they intend to be a partner or subcontractor in the program.

XII. Living Wage

- Living Wage information will be provided in the next presentation in the conference.
- All Living Wage requirements must be met, unless your organization meets one of the four exemptions.

XIII. Required Forms

Make sure you complete each of the required forms and have the appropriate person sign it. Some of the specific forms will be reviewed during the later part of the Proposer's conference. If you have any questions about the forms, make sure you ask them during the question and answer period.

XIV. Cost Proposal

- As with the business proposal, follow the format exactly as requested in the RFP. Do not get creative.
- Use the required bid and budget forms in the Request for Proposals.
- Pay close attention to the budget.
- The budget should be realistic and complete. The costs must match the services to be provided.
- The narrative should clearly explain what each budget item is for.
- List nothing in the budget that is not explained and justified in the narrative.
- Identify required personnel by function; e.g., three case managers, two clerks. Include salaries and benefits.
- Provide an explanation of unusual requests.
- Check your math! It's very embarrassing to have the evaluators find a major math error in your proposal. It can also put your entire proposal in jeopardy. If you underbid due to an error in your budget, the County will expect you to honor your bid amount, not what it would have been if you fixed the error.

XV. Proposal Submission

- How will your proposal be packaged? Do you have sufficient binders, dividers?
- Proofread it one last time – cover-to-cover – check math – check that all the required forms are complete and signed.
- Identify the “original” proposal separately from the copies for both the business proposal and the cost proposal.
- Check the original and each copy for completeness. Ensure there are no missing pages or chapters.
- Seal the original and copies in a package and label appropriately.
- Address the proposal as directed in the guidelines.
- If mailing, don’t forget to check the mail/courier service schedule. Allow time for mailing. If the mail/courier service delivers it after the deadline, it will not be accepted.
- If hand-carrying, make sure you allow sufficient time for traffic. If the proposal is due at 5:00 p.m., don’t leave Santa Monica at 4:45 p.m. and expect to be at the City of Industry on time. The proposal must be received by the time specified in the RFP. **No late proposals will be accepted.**
- The clock on the wall in the reception area will be used as the official time clock. If the proposal is due at 5:00 p.m., do not try to convince us that your watch says 4:58 p.m. Allow yourself some extra time.
- A traffic accident on the 605 is not a reason for a late proposal.
- Getting lost on the way to DPSS Headquarters is not a reason for a late proposal.
- No, we cannot take the original at 4:59 p.m. and get the copies the next day.
- Timely means your entire proposal with all the copies are in DPSS hands by the date and time specified in the RFP.